

West Sussex County Council – Agenda Item No. 9 – Written Questions

18 September 2020

1. Written question from Cllr Noel Atkins for reply by the Cabinet Member for Economy and Corporate Resources

Question

I have a great interest and background in IT and built the IT Junction at Heene Community Centre with a grant from the County Council to provide the residents of Worthing with free hands-on advice and use of computer systems.

Can the Cabinet Member, therefore, please describe the kind of emerging technologies that are in the IT Strategy and how they might be effectively deployed in the future.

Answer

The IT Strategy references the following emerging technologies:

- Virtual assistants that can operate at the explicit or implicit direction of the user (for example, virtual personal assistants and chatbots). These can be used for the enable automation of routine tasks and then, as they grow in sophistication, more complex tasks can be added to their repertoire.
- Independent agents that operate in the background and are not invoked directly by the user. For example, an independent agent might monitor a place and make decisions that changes the actions and activity of control systems. This might range from intelligent street lights through to whole place management.

The application of machine learning and AI to analytical systems can transform how analytics content is developed, consumed and shared, for example:

- Augmented data preparation, which uses machine learning automation to augment data preparation activities such as data quality management, modelling, enrichment, and metadata development.
- Augmented business intelligence (BI), which enables business users and others to automatically find, visualize and narrate relevant findings without building models or writing algorithms.

Microsoft Power BI products have been selected as many of these capabilities are or will be included within this product set as they become more mainstream. This will enable response to the increase in data generated by the IoT as well as making the analytical capability more sophisticated.

Elsewhere in this strategy describes how IT services will be migrated to a cloud-based delivery model. One of the advantages of cloud-based solutions is that they have capacity in depth and can respond to high demand for processing and other technical requirements. At the same time the power and capabilities of 'end-point' devices (e.g. laptops, smartphones, IoT devices, consumer technologies) is also increasing. These devices collectively may be referred to as 'edge' computing. Edge computing

will tend to keep the data traffic and processing local, with the goal being to reduce data transmissions and to speed up local responses. It is expected that intelligence will enhance a range of edge devices including edge input/output devices such as speakers and screens, edge computing devices such as smartphones and laptops, and complex edge devices such as vehicles and power generators. This intelligence at the edge will provide opportunity to deliver services in new ways, or example using virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) technologies.

- VR provides a computer-generated 3D environment that surrounds a user and responds to an individual's actions in a natural way.
- AR is the real-time use of information in the form of text, graphics, video and other virtual enhancements integrated with real-world objects.

AR aims to enhance users' interaction with the real physical environment, rather than separating them from it. Both AR and VR will be enhanced by technology capabilities that will improve visual interaction and allow other sensory models, such as touch and sound. There are several examples of VR or AR in use in the UK public sector. While most of these are experimental, it is likely that use will become mainstream. The County Council's computing facilities will enable VR and AR solutions.

The sense of immersion within a virtual world or when interacting with digital entities is enhanced by the growth in capability of conversational platforms that provide an interface that is mainly in the user's spoken or written natural language. Conversational platforms are most recognisably implemented in:

- Virtual personal assistants, such as Amazon Alexa, Apple's Siri, Google Assistant and Microsoft's Cortana
- Virtual customer assistants, such as IPsoft's Amelia and Watson Virtual Agent
- Chatbot frameworks, such as Amazon Lex, Dialogflow from Google, IBM Watson Assistant and Microsoft Bot Framework

While interactions in conversational platforms are currently relatively simple (e.g. "What's the weather today") or via a highly structured interaction such as that required to book a hotel room, the technology will mature. This will enable extremely complex requests and activities, for example collecting oral testimony from crime witnesses and then creating an image of the suspect.

2. Written question from Cllr Kate O'Kelly for reply by the Cabinet Member for Economy and Corporate Resources

Question

Can the Cabinet Member please:

- (a) Confirm how much funding has been provided to the County Council by the European Union through the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) since 1 April 2015?
- (b) Provide a break-down of funding from each of the strands of the ESIF (which includes the European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund and

the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development), for each of the last five years and in respect of each of those years confirm what any funding provided has been used for.

- (c) In 2017, the UK government announced that it would replace EU Structural Funds with a successor arrangement called the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Does the Cabinet member have any further information regarding the intention to replace the funds previously provided by the EU to ensure the residents of West Sussex do not miss out?

Answer

(a) and

- (b) The main funds received by the County Council are in the areas of economy, education and energy. For economy in the last five years the County Council has received:

- LEADER programme with £2.9 million from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development providing grants to rural businesses and communities
- SPARK Social Enterprise Project with £230,000 Interreg 2 Seas funding to support and enable innovation among social enterprises
- Downs Link cycling and walking improvements to support the visitor economy – delivered by countryside services – with £557,000 from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

The Council has committed match funding through the economy reserve for two further projects and awaits final decisions from the managing authority on the bids to the European Regional Development Fund. One concerns business innovation and the other the low carbon sector.

Other funds have been levered by providing match funding, mainly through the Strategic Investment Fund to the University of Chichester led Hot House business support, this received a £5.5m European Regional Development Fund allocation.

For Education in the last five years the Council has received the following ESIF funding in relation to the current NEETS programme which comes to an end in December 2020:

2018/19 - £140,000

2019/20 - £233,000

2020/21 - £58,000 to date with a further £123,000 (approx.) pending between now and the project end date

This is match funded by the Local Authority.

For Energy in the last five years the Council has received: BISEPS Project, based in Manor Royal Business Park, funded by the Interreg 2 Seas programme to explore, encourage and implement exchange of renewable energy in business parks with £231,099 received to date with a further £90,000 (approx.) pending between now project end date of April 2021.

An LECSEA Project is to be funded by the Interreg 2 Seas programme to explore the financial and legal structures for Local Energy Communities including capital works to install battery storage for the Local Energy Community. Over the life of the project (February 2020 to March 2023) the County Council will receive EUR 800,000 of *de minimis* funding from the Interreg 2 Seas Programme. To date no funding for LECSEA has been received.

Both projects are match funded by the Council.

- (c) On the UK Shared Prosperity Fund there have been no further updates that the Council is aware of.

3. Written question from Cllr Heidi Brunsdon for reply by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Question

It has been recently reported that nationally only around 8,173 Children Looked After (CLA) are enrolled in university this academic year. It paints a sad picture, during lockdown, of many disadvantaged students going through A Levels completely alone. It is well known that students from such backgrounds are, on average, two years of learning behind their more affluent or fortunate peers by the end of secondary school. They are twice as likely to be predicted an E at A Level than those from less disadvantaged backgrounds.

Could the Cabinet Member, please:

- (a) Confirm how many of our CLA took A levels this year;
- (b) Provide a breakdown of results, such as percentages of A-E grades obtained by those students;
- (c) Advise how these results compare with those generally across the county;
- (d) Advise how these results compare with results for CLA over the last three years in West Sussex; and
- (e) Advise how these results compare to our authority neighbours in East Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey and Kent, and nationally, over the last three years.

Answer

During the academic year 2019/20, we had 131 students registered with the virtual school. They undertook a range of qualifications at level 3 including A levels which can lead onto higher education should they chose to pursue this pathway.

As most students undertaking A levels or other level 3 qualifications are 18 years or over by the time, they complete their courses and they are therefore considered to be care leavers. The level of involvement with the virtual school is therefore limited once they are 18 years and any sharing of information requires the consent of the young person. The Virtual School requests that the young people share their results but this does not always give a full picture of outcomes as some young people choose not to engage with this process.

Due to the constantly evolving nature of the year 13 cohort and the changing needs to our young people every year, along with the incomplete data set, it is not possible to give year on year comparisons.

With specific reference to the 2019/20 examinations, the Department for Education (DfE) [announced on the 8th April](#) that school, college or multi-academy trust (MAT) level performance data based on summer 2020 tests, assessments and exams at any phase would not be published and therefore there will be no data available to Virtual Schools. The Department of Education does not publish any local authority level data for post 16 children looked after and therefore there is no local or national data available to demonstrate trends or comparisons over time.

4. Written question from Cllr Brian Quinn for reply by the Cabinet Member for Environment

Question

On Friday 17 July West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (WSFRS) was called to the Household Waste Recycling Site in Crawley at 6.50pm. I understand that firefighters then battled a huge blaze for around 12 hours affecting 40 tonnes of waste at the site with crews from Crawley, East Grinstead, Petworth, Haywards Heath, Horsham, Turners Hill, Burgess Hill and Reigate in Surrey in attendance. At the time of submitting this question the site remains closed to residents so that structural engineers can inspect the extent of the damage to the building and to allow for burnt and dampened waste to be removed. Local residents are being asked to store their waste rather than making longer journeys to dispose of it.

This is not the first fire at this site, neither is it the first fire this year resulting in the closure of a household waste site.

Can the Cabinet Member, therefore, please:

- (a) Provide me with the dates of other fires at or within the West Sussex household waste sites since 2005, confirming which sites were affected, the cause of the fires (if known), whether it resulted in the closure of the facility and what additional measures were installed to prevent further fires at each site;
- (b) Given that the sites are operated by an external provider, confirm the position regarding liability and who is responsible for the cost of insuring the facilities;
- (c) Confirm the estimated total cost to the County Council of the fires referred to in (a) above, including waste clearance, additional staffing arrangements, increases in insurance premiums and additional measures to prevent further fires; and
- (d) Confirm when she anticipates the Crawley site re-opening to residents and what additional fire prevention measures she is proposing to introduce to this site.

Answer

(a)

2020/21

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
28/04/20	Identified around 05:30	Major	Burgess Hill TS	Artic trailer of MDR, parked outside in yard	Smoke discovered by arriving drivers
17/07/20	Approx 18:30	Major	Crawley	Fire in CA waste	Smoke discovered by people in local area

2019/20

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
02/04/19	approx 20:00	Major	Westhampnett	Transfer Station	Commenced in CA pile, whole shed destroyed
15/05/19	approx 19:30	Major	Westhampnett	RORO vehicle outside in yard	Electrical fault on the vehicle - whole vehicle destroyed
02/03/20	approx 18:00	Major	Westhampnett HWRS	Outside while shed was being rebuilt	Commenced in CA pile.

2018/19 - No records**2017/18** - No fires**2016/17**

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
06/05/16	approx 15:30	Minor	Westhampnett	Transfer Station	CA pile, something smouldering, so removed from shed and extinguished.
04/08/16	approx 21:00hrs	Major	Burgess Hill TS	Transfer Station CA pile	Corner of shed and part of the roof needed to be rebuilt. Very short term diversion of WCAs, HWRS unaffected (as containerised)
26/08/16	Afternoon	Minor	Horsham HWRS	Container for metal	Believed to be from hot coals from a disposable BBQ
06/02/17	16:10	Minor	Worthing	WEEE container	Cause not conclusive, likely battery ignition

2015/16

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
29/05/15	approx 16:15	Major	Crawley	In a loaded artic trailer, inside the shed	While artic was being loaded with WEEE, variety of fire appliances attended and site closed for approx for 2 days.
19/08/15	15:45	Minor	Burgess Hill TS	Small fire in MDR pile	
03/09/15	Afternoon	Minor	Burgess Hill TS	Small fire in MDR pile	
17/09/15	approx 11:00	Minor	Lancing TS	In a loaded artic trailer, inside the shed	

2014/15

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
10/09/14	approx 15:00	Minor	Crawley	MDR after it had been tipped from RCV	Staff wet area with hoses, fire service called and hose down.
15/10/14	approx 14:30	Minor	Crawley	Mattress smouldering in CA pile	
03/02/15	approx 13:30	Minor	MBT	Fire caused by maintenance in wet pre-treatment	
14/03/15	14:10	minor	Westhampnett HWRS	Fire in small WEEE skip in HWRS area	Site closed while Fire Service doused container with water. Once safe they left and site was re-opened.

2013/14 - No fires recorded**2012/13**

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
03/07/12	approx 13:00	Major	Burgess Hill	MSDC refuse freighter fire in Burgess Hill yard	Fire service called - site evacuated and closed for the rest of the day. Fire was behind the cab which then caused the fuel tank to rupture.

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
01/08/12	approx 21:00	Major	Woodhorn Tangmere	Fire in wood pile	RCVs with green diverted the following day
02/10/12	04:00hrs	Major	Chi Depot	RCV caught fire overnight while in their workshop	

2011/12

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
15/03/12	approx 08:30	Minor	Shoreham	Hot ashes placed in a bin by customer.	Site evacuated, while fire service in attendance

2010/11

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
27/05/11	approx 12:30	Major	Ford MRF	Fire in plastics bunker	Site evacuated and fire service attended. Material diverted to Crayford (not sure how long out of service).

2009/10 - No fires recorded

2008/09

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
09/06/08	18:00hrs	Major	Crawley	Fire commenced in CA area and destroyed shed	Fire in destroyed shed, which reopened 1 April 2019 (It had only been built and operating since 7 Aug 2006)

2007/08 - No data available

2006/07 - No fires recorded

2005/06

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
26/03/06	Unknown	Major	Burgess Hill	Fire in TS (unknown)	TS and HWS closed all day (this was

Date of fire	Time	Scale	Site	What was affected	Other information
				exactly where)	before the site was constructed as it is now).

- (b) Viridor is liable and responsible for the insurance on the facilities.
- (c) No additional costs for the County Council as these costs sit with Viridor.
- (d) The Household Waste Recycling Site in Crawley remains closed following the fire on 17 July. Contractors have carried out work to clear and clean the internal and external areas of the building which were affected by the fire.

A full structural assessment to see what other work may be needed for the site has been undertaken. This showed that one major and approximately 20 minor beams need replacing. In addition, most of the shutters and the electric/lighting systems in the building will have to be repaired or replaced. Most damage is towards the back of the shed (where the public tip waste through the windows) hence the need to set up a temporary public area on the lower part of the site. Viridor has sent out tenders for this work and anticipate that the work will take a minimum of six weeks from award of contract. All potential contractors have suggested they can start the work quickly.

Additional fire prevention measures have not been discussed; these will form part of the discussions with the Environment Agency as part of a revised fire prevention plan. At this stage, there is no confirmed date for when the site will fully reopen. In the meantime, the nearby sites at Horsham and East Grinstead are open seven days per week.

5. Written question from Cllr Brenda Burgess for reply by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

Question

In the light of the many objections and concerns received from residents in Three Bridges and Pound Hill South division and more widely in the Borough of Crawley about the temporary pop-up cycle lane, have such concerns and objections been made from other areas of West Sussex and in the light of such objections and concerns how will these be addressed? Could the Cabinet Member advise if they will they be removed?’

Answer

There has been a great deal of publicity since May when the Secretary of State for Transport announced a £2bn package to ‘create a new era for cycling and walking’. More than 250 suggestions for temporary schemes were received from residents, district and borough councils and cycling fora. Positive and negative comments have been received about the schemes.

Post-opening road safety reviews will be undertaken for each scheme which will involve experienced and independent road safety auditors, a representative from Sussex Police and the County Council’s Cycling Development Officer.

In order to allow time for traffic patterns around each scheme to settle it will be beneficial to allow approximately six weeks from each scheme’s opening which will

result in a rolling review process. Each scheme will have a separate report that will present the data together with a commentary and recommendation. The recommendation will either be to:

- retain for a further period and future review,
- to amend and review in future, or
- to remove the scheme.

The Cabinet Member has set up an Executive Task and Finish Group (TFG) to act as a critical friend for officers and advise the Cabinet Member in respect of the County Council's response to the Emergency Active Travel Fund and the review of the Walking and Cycling Strategy. Each report will be presented to the Cabinet Member and the Executive TFG. The TFG will be asked for their consideration and to provide feedback to the Cabinet Member. On receipt of the TFG feedback, the Cabinet Member will be asked to consider the future of each scheme.